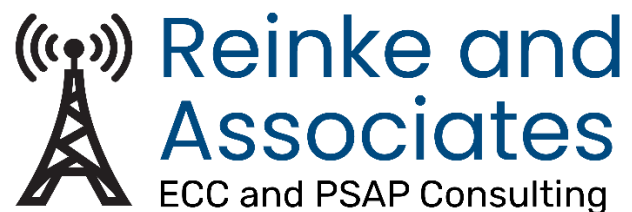


***Pacific County Communications (PACCOM)***

**2024 Strategic Plan**

***Administrative Board Review***

***June 14, 2024***



# Table of Contents

- Executive Summary ..... 1**
- Plan Deployment Considerations ..... 1**
  - Leadership Change ..... 1
  - Operations Board Effectiveness ..... 1
- Planning Process Overview ..... 2**
  - Strengths ..... 2
  - Weaknesses ..... 2
  - Opportunities ..... 3
  - Threats ..... 3
- Staffing ..... 3**
  - Line ..... 3
  - Training and Supervision ..... 5
  - Administration ..... 6
- Technology ..... 6**
- Performance ..... 8**
  - Performance Assessment ..... 8
  - Performance Management ..... 9
- Finance ..... 10**
  - Capital Plan ..... 10
  - Sustainable Funding ..... 11

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## *Executive Summary*

In December 2023, as requested by the PACCOM Administrative Board, [Reinke and Associates](#) was retained by Pacific County to facilitate a strategic planning process.

During three meetings in early 2024, the Board identified seven strategic goals as follows:

- 1. Recruit, hire and train line employees until PACCOM's budgeted positions are filled.**
- 2. Address short and long term staffing and organizational development needs.**
- 3. Improve the coverage and performance of the radio system.**
- 4. Analyze technical system replacement and facility needs.**
- 5. Measure and improve the agency's performance.**
- 6. Develop a capital plan.**
- 7. Assure long term sustainable funding.**

This report is divided into four sections: staffing, technology, performance and finance. Each starts with the section's goals followed by relevant background information and recommended strategies.

The plan's seven goals are generally in priority order, but it should be possible to apply strategies concurrently in most areas. Of course, real-world conditions will dictate the rate of progress for each goal. To track progress, both Boards should periodically review and adjust the plan's goals and strategies.

The agency's staffing challenges made specific timeline commitments impractical and therefore, they are deliberately vague or absent.

Some of the issues raised regarding day to day operations were tactical. An overarching goal for this plan is to establish a foundation for the agency to become more responsive and effective as it improves its level of service to the area's responders and the public.

## *Plan Deployment Considerations*

### **Leadership Change**

The soon to be hired Director will bring unique knowledge, skills, abilities and experience to PACCOM and will work closely with the Boards and staff to lead the agency into the future. This will likely result in changes to the goals, strategies and timelines outlined herein.

### **Operations Board Effectiveness**

A consensus shared by all public-safety disciplines is operational policies and procedures for communications must be clear to minimize operational errors due to ambiguity or inconsistency.

For many years, to initiate communication law enforcement agencies served by PACCOM have said their unit number, followed by "County" to hail a dispatcher to start a radio conversation. When PACCOM initiates a law enforcement radio conversation, the dispatcher says a unit number, followed by "County" to hail a field unit. This is often known as an "order model".

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

In March 2024, the Pacific County Sheriff directed his staff to reverse the order model without coordinating nor informing other law enforcement agencies who share the same dispatch channel. The Sheriff repeatedly stated, despite strong objection from other law enforcement agency Chiefs and PACCOM's staff, the change he made does not affect other PACCOM users.

Using two different order models on the same dispatch channel is unprecedented. It adds unnecessary confusion and therefore, risk. To Reinke and Associates' knowledge, no ECC anywhere deliberately operates with two different order models on the same dispatch channel.

Should the Sheriff continue to exercise his authority to make unilateral, uncoordinated changes to operational procedures, the effectiveness of the Operation Board will be compromised.

## *Planning Process Overview*

In addition to time spent observing and monitoring PACCOM operations, Reinke and Associates held three stakeholder meetings with the Administrative Board, user agency representatives and PACCOM staff members, culminating in a consensus for the seven goals addressed in this plan. Part of the process included a discussion regarding PACCOM's Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT), which produced the following:

### **Strengths**

- Staff dedication evidenced by their willingness to continue to work significant amounts of overtime to meet PACCOM's minimum staffing level.
- Staff's proficiency and the accuracy of information obtained.
- Staff's desire to do a good job and their commitment to service.
- Professional interaction with responder agencies and other ECCs.

### **Weaknesses**

- Inadequate staffing.
- Inadequate supervision.
- Inadequate quality improvement (QI) program.
- Inadequate accountability at all levels.
- Inadequate resolution for responder agency complaints and concerns.
- Inappropriate non-emergency duties are performed by dispatchers.
- No surge capacity.
- No Director assistance with non-emergency calls during surges.
- Inconsistency between dispatchers in their application of operational policies and procedures.
- The Operations Board is not effectively utilized.
- Inadequate Global Information Service (GIS) location accuracy.
- Inconsistent application of communication protocols by some responders.
  - The radio system, not phones or messaging, should be the primary mechanism for responders to communicate with dispatchers.
- Low use of Mobile Data Computer (MDC) functionality by law enforcement except by South Bend PD.
- Radio system coverage and functionality.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

- Simplex fire dispatch requires dispatchers to rebroadcast all responder transmissions.
- Further investigation of countywide simulcast should be explored.
- Lack of consistent fire and law enforcement call taking protocols.
- Continuity of operations risk with no back-up center
- Impact of full staffing on staff income without as much overtime.
- Verify remediation of mold in the basement.

## Opportunities

- Process improvement.
- Utilization of Board expertise and assistance.
- Improve dispatcher involvement in operational decisions.
- Improve supervision.

## Threats

- Inability to function if staffing becomes inadequate to operate PACCOM.
- PACCOM goes off-line due to a natural disaster.

Some SWOT items are tactical, but the input, especially weaknesses, was considered while developing the strategies detailed herein. As noted in the plan, additions to administrative and supervisory staffing levels are necessary to create a foundation to resolve shorter term tactical concerns.

## Staffing

<p><b>Goal 1 – Recruit, hire and train line employees until PACCOM’s budgeted positions are filled.</b> <b>Goal 2 – Address short and long term staffing and organizational development needs.</b></p>
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## Line

### Background

PACCOM budgets 11 full-time equivalent (FTE) line employees and 1 first line supervisor, a staffing model intended to staff 2 console positions 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

As of May 10, 2024, the supervisor position is vacant; 1 line position is vacant (a candidate is in the background investigation process); 2 employees are in training; and 8 employees are trained. This is an improvement from a few months ago, which the Director attributes to additional advertising and using CritiCall for entry level testing.

Fully trained line employees continue to work substantial amounts of overtime, recently averaging between 30 and 40 hours each month per person. Although this is an improvement, the risk of staff burn-out and turnover remains.

### Strategies in Progress

The County improved and shortened the hiring timeline including leaving vacant positions open until filled; revising the testing methodology; and adding more flexibility for candidates to test, interview and complete post conditional offer hiring requirements.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## *Additional Strategies*

### **Website Recruitment Tools**

Update the agency website with more general information about the profession and its vital role of supporting public-safety. Consider creating a short video that highlights the work done by PACCOM. A search engine query with the terms “dispatcher recruitment videos” results in several creative approaches intended to encourage potential candidates to consider the job.

### **Advertising**

Consider paid advertising on social media that targets people in PACCOM’s service area who fit appropriate demographics.

### **Publicity**

Take advantage of successes to issue press releases for positive media publicity to remind people of PACCOM’s important role in public-safety. Positive public awareness augments recruitment efforts.

### **Employee Recognition**

Evaluate whether the existing employee recognition program could be improved.

### **Culture**

Everyone in the agency must be committed to making the work environment as positive and supportive as possible, not just for new hire success, but to make PACCOM a place where all employees know their work is important, valued and supported.

### **Workload and Complexity Reduction<sup>1</sup>**

Consider the following guidelines for a policy and procedure change management process:

1. Form two task forces; one for law enforcement and one the fire service that includes dispatch and responder leaders and line personnel to develop updated and improved policies, procedures and workflows.
2. Focus efforts on reducing workload and complexity wherever possible. Areas of emphasis should include:
  - i) Elimination of ancillary, non-emergency and non-essential duties.
  - ii) Consistent dispatch terminology with standardized, concise phraseology.
  - iii) Greater Mobile Data Computer (MDC) use by law enforcement personnel.
3. Confirm changes are supported by technical systems and if not, document any updates or additions necessary to make required changes and/or future technology acquisitions.
4. Clearly document all policies, procedures and workflows and assure they are aligned with current practices.
5. Present the comprehensive policy and procedure manual for Operations Board review.
6. The Operations Board should adopt recommended changes and confirm customer agency department heads will actively support and enforce them.
  - i) Responder agency policies and procedures must also be updated.

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<sup>1</sup> Although tactical, high workload and complexity levels impact staff retention, a significant strategic issue.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

7. Develop comprehensive training guides and document the training delivered to dispatch *and* field personnel.
8. Assure PACCOM *and* user agency leaders and first line supervisors address non-compliance.

## Training and Supervision

### *Background*

#### **Overview**

The budgeted supervisor position has been vacant for years, which has required the Director, who is inexperienced in ECC operations, to also serve as a first line supervisor. Many issues identified by stakeholders in the planning meetings stem from a lack of experienced staff to accomplish administrative and supervisory tasks and oversight.

#### **New Hire Training**

Trainee success is vital to continue to improve staffing and retention. PACCOM must assure its training program is current, comprehensive and balances encouragement with honest feedback and accountability.

#### **Continuing Education**

In addition to County required refresher training, continuing education for dispatch protocols and ACCESS are two areas which must also be accommodated.

### *Strategies*

#### **Supervisor Staffing Level**

Fill the vacant supervisor position and add another. Consider scheduling supervisors during periods of higher activity to serve as an additional resource for surges in call volume. Because the agency's peak activity occurs on day and swing shift, having supervisors overlap their shifts with added benefit of their shifts overlapping day and swing shift.

#### **Quality Improvement (QI)**

Determine whether the current program is effective and make improvements where possible. Agency performance and staff retention is improved when line employees have clarity about expectations for their job duties and positive performance is reinforced.

#### **Supervisor Responsibilities**

A supervisor should be responsible for the agency's training program and should also manage the quality improvement program. This duty should not rotate among supervisory personnel.

#### **Lead Dispatcher Role**

Review lead dispatcher requirements and duties to ascertain whether they can be made more effective.

#### **Conferences and Training**

Staff should be afforded opportunities to attend relevant out of office conferences and training. Getting away from the ECC to interact with colleagues improves morale and retention. Meeting people from other ECCs also facilitates collaboration and often provides valuable insights and perspective.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## Administration

### Background

Some of the comments made during the planning sessions centered on the level of attention given by the Director to resolve complaints and operational issues raised by user agencies. With only one administrative level employee, the agency's capacity to address and manage the organization has been limited.

### Strategies

#### Exempt Leadership Role

The agency would benefit from an additional, exempt leadership position, which should be informed by new Director's knowledge, skills, abilities and interests. If the new Director is strong in operations, he could serve as a *de facto* Operations Manager and work directly with supervisors on operational policies and procedures, the training program and performance management. In that case an option would be to hire an Administrative Services Manager responsible for, but not limited to, finance, human resources including hiring, State 9-1-1 Program Office interaction, grant requests, contract management, web site content updates, meeting management and minute taking. If the new Director is an experienced administrator but not as strong operationally, then hiring an Operations Manager or Deputy Director may be a better option.

#### Support for Essential Functions

Additional functions which need to be addressed are Spillman and Graphical Information Systems (GIS) administration and maintenance, either by hiring a FTE (ideally with both skills) or contracting with another agency or supplier.

If PACCOM continues to significantly fund improvements and maintenance for the area's radio system infrastructure, as part of a future organizational development assessment, consider whether the technical specialists working for Public Works should be reassigned to PACCOM.

## Technology

**Goal 3 – Improve the coverage and performance of the radio system.**

**Goal 4 – Analyze technical system replacement and facility needs.**

### Background

#### General

For an ECC to be successful, operations must be supported, but not driven by technology.

The need to plan and budget technical projects often focuses attention on solving a problem, such as radio coverage or capacity, without considering the impact on dispatch and field operations. For an ECC to operate effectively, it is imperative technology and operations function in a symbiotic partnership. Technology projects should always start by focusing first on consensus driven operational requirements to answer the question, "*What operational problem are we trying to solve?*" Those discussions should form the foundation to explore and compare solutions and costs.



# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## Communications Northwest Radio Report

An assessment and analysis of the public safety radio system was completed in June 2023 by Communications Northwest. The company's report noted several maintenance issues, but overall, PACCOM's system infrastructure and remote site connectivity is generally in good condition.

Regarding recommendations for future improvements, the report appeared significantly influenced by a fixed view of the current infrastructure including existing radio site locations. That paradigm limitation produced recommendations, including a three-pod multicast approach for PACCOM's service area.

Board members, user agency leaders and the radio system maintenance staff have acknowledged they do not have extensive radio system design expertise. Understandably, that resulted in what appears to be reluctant acceptance among users that a multicast system is as good as it gets for PACCOM's service area, which is not necessarily the case.

To explore and cost additional "*what-if?*" options such as countywide simulcast on multiple channels, which would provide a more robust alternative to improve operations, it is necessary to set aside limitations on system design parameters. That can only be accomplished by a Subject Matter Expert (SME) with extensive public safety technical system experience designing, configuring, costing and deploying ECC and Land Mobile Radio (LMR) technology options.

## South County

At present, users, staff and the Boards are poised to move forward with a plan to improve the radio system for the South County. It is commendable the radio maintenance team has worked with users to develop a plan for an interim solution for testing.

A tactical issue is the proposed South County fire service configuration adds another radio channel for dispatchers to monitor. Reinke and Associates views this with trepidation due to the additional workload responsibility, but supports the concept *provided* it is considered an interim step to a more comprehensive, countywide radio system plan.

The strategic challenge is current emphasis on South County issues is not integrated with a medium to long term comprehensive approach to countywide system improvements, nor is there a plan and budget for the system's long-term improvement and eventual replacement.

## Megler Tower

It is important to note added transmitter power and height does not necessarily solve issues related to radio coverage and signal density and can make designing effective future simulcast coverage more difficult by expanding potential overlap zones.

Although raising the tower may improve specific problem areas, if an investment of approximately \$400,000 is made, it should be part of a long term, countywide system design.

## Continuity of Operations

The agency's continuity of operations plan has not yet incorporated the availability of the County's mobile command unit.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## Radio System Planning

The agency has retained a Subject Matter Expert (SME) with extensive ECC communication and technical system experience to serve as a project manager, user advocate and advisor for the radio system. His assistance will benefit the agency by assuring funds spent on improvements support a comprehensive, countywide system design.

## Strategies

If satisfied with the SME's performance, as the work above nears completion, consider adding the following two components necessary for long-term planning to his Scope of Work:

1. Update and validate equipment replacement assumptions and costs.
2. Assist with the development of the technology infrastructure portion of PACCOM's capital plan.

Also consider retaining the SME to consult on an as needed basis to advise and assist the agency with technology planning for future improvements.

## Continuity of Operations Planning

As it considers risks to the ECC and its supporting infrastructure, the agency should evaluate and cost its options, including relocation to other facilities and/or the County's mobile command unit.

## Timeline

With professional assistance, PACCOM should be able to accomplish planning and deploying improvements to the radio system over the next few months. Significant progress is also expected on the first two strategies above within eighteen months.

## Performance

**Goal 5 – Measure and improve the agency's performance.**

## Performance Assessment

### Background

#### National Standard Compliance

At present, PACCOM meets [9-1-1 call answering time standards](#) set by the [National Emergency Number Association \(NENA\)](#), which are to answer 90% of all 9-1-1 calls within 15 seconds, and 95% of all 9-1-1 calls within 20 seconds over a 24-hour period.

It is unknown whether the agency meets [National Fire Protection Association \(NFPA\) 1221](#) Sub-section 15.4, which details time standards for dispatching emergency calls because the CAD system does not assign a priority level for any call nature. (For reference, the NFPA standards are to dispatch at least 90% of all calls within 60 seconds and 99% of all calls within 120 seconds<sup>2</sup>, although many ECCs only focus on meeting the standards for high priority incidents.)

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<sup>2</sup> (Exceptions exist for the use of answering protocols, calls involving translation or a LE response, text to 911/TTY/TTD, HAZMAT, technical rescue, transferred calls or when the caller's location cannot be readily determined.)

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## *Strategies*

### **CAD Nature Codes**

Collaborate with the Operations Board to assign priorities to each Spillman CAD nature code. Doing so would make it easier to generate dispatch time performance reports to evaluate the agency's performance dispatching top priority incidents, especially during periods of peak activity.

### **Surveys**

An often overlooked tool to measure performance is conducting ongoing surveys of citizen callers as well as periodic surveys of responders. The [Valley Communications Center](#) (ValleyCom) has a comprehensive program for surveying 9-1-1 callers that could serve as a model.

## **Performance Management**

### *Background*

#### **Administration and Supervision**

Many of the issues identified in this report stem from a lack of experienced leadership combined with a lack of staff to accomplish administrative and supervisory tasks and oversight. Strategies to address shortcomings in this area were addressed earlier.

#### **Line Staffing**

Once PACCOM achieves the line staffing level necessary to meet its two person staffing model without excessive overtime, if an analysis of dispatch times indicates difficulty meeting the NFPA standard, consider budgeting additional FTEs to enhance line staffing. Additional staff assigned to work during PACCOM's busiest days and hours, including supervisors as noted above, would improve the agency's service level. Being able to focus on incoming calls eliminates the need for call receivers to continually interrupt callers to answer radio traffic, resulting in faster call processing times and less frustration for the public. Responders benefit because their dispatcher does not have to tell them to "stand by" to deal with emergency calls which distract them from paying full attention to field unit radio traffic.

#### **Accreditation and Certifications**

Agency performance may be improved by accomplishing [APCO Project 33](#) Training Program Certification, which confirms the agency is following industry training program elements and standards, including Communications Training Officer (CTO) certification for dispatchers who train other employees.

Although expensive and time consuming, accreditation by the [Commission on Accreditation for Law Enforcement Agencies \(CALEA\)](#) is a possibility for the future. (The [Northwest Accreditation Alliance](#) also offers accreditation for Oregon and Alaska ECCs.) In the meantime, the self-assessment guides used by these agencies are valuable resources for awareness of industry standards and best practices.

#### **Staff Accountability**

As noted earlier, once operational policies and procedures are clearly defined in both the ECC and responder agency manuals, the training programs for dispatcher and field personnel must

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

be aligned, updated and communicated. Doing so provides a foundation for supervision and allows accountability for employees unable or unwilling to follow policies and procedures.

In understaffed agencies disciplinary processes tend to be underutilized, if not completely overlooked, when staffing is so short the agency cannot afford to lose trained employees due to resignation or termination. This dynamic is why improving line staffing is a top priority goal.

## Finance

**Goal 6 – Develop a capital plan.**

**Goal 7 – Assure long term sustainable funding.**

### Capital Plan

#### Background

##### General

The agency needs a capital plan to integrate long-term facility and technical system needs and replacement costs into PACCOM’s strategy for sustainable funding for the organization.

ECCs are incredibly technology intensive and must assure all mission critical equipment is periodically replaced to avoid unplanned failures. In addition to the radio system, there are other major components which must be analyzed to assure they remain up to date and reliable.

##### Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) System

The agency’s staff and users seem reasonably satisfied with their Spillman CAD system, including its integration with records management, corrections and other modules. The agency and its users appear to be addressing ongoing system administration and the support necessary to maintain its hardware and connectivity.

##### 9-1-1 and Administrative Phone Systems

The agency is also attending to the maintenance and operation of its phone systems. Along with the radio system and CAD, eventual replacement of these systems must be accounted for in the agency’s capital plan.

##### Continuity of Operations / Back-Up Center

As the agency updates its continuity of operations plan, it needs to determine whether there are any capital costs related to its chosen alternative(s).

##### Ancillary Systems

Support for the agency’s logging recorder, time synchronization device, switches, routers, security equipment, back-up power systems and console furniture are all components which must be considered in an equipment replacement schedule.

#### Strategy

Determine whether County resources are adequate to create a capital plan and if not, consider outsourcing the project.

# Pacific County Communications (PACCOM) 2024 Strategic Plan

## *Timeline*

The agency's capital plan will require assistance from staff and/or consultants to accurately assess and propose enhancements to current systems and facilities as well as the creation of replacement schedules for technical systems.

## **Sustainable Funding**

### *Background*

PACCOM is funded by Federal grants, State Military Department contracts, 9-1-1 access line taxes and user fees. Once accomplished, the costs for the organization development considerations detailed herein along with a capital plan will help the Board forecast PACCOM's long term funding needs.

Although grants may be obtained for specific technical projects, they are not usually available for ongoing operations and/or maintenance and should not be considered "sustainable funding".

### *Strategy*

Should the Board discover the funding necessary to sustain PACCOM's long term operational and capital budget needs would result in significant, ongoing user fee increases, consider petitioning the Board of County Commissioners to approve a ballot measure to increase the County's sales tax from 0.1% of 1% to 0.2% of 1% to fund emergency communications systems per [RCW 82.14.420](#).

If a sales tax increase is proposed, considerable effort will be required to develop fact-based justifications to explain why the added tax is needed followed by extensive outreach by staff and PACCOM stakeholders to councils, boards, community groups, the media and the public. An argument for a sales tax increase would be to spread the burden of funding PACCOM from the user agencies which rely heavily on property taxes to the numerous visitors who take advantage of the area's recreational opportunities.

### *Timeline*

The timing for these goals is contingent on the progress made toward the accomplishment of all previous goals. The information developed will inform the Boards whether additional funding is necessary long term to improve and sustain technical systems and support the staffing changes necessary to deliver the level of service set by the Boards to deliver to the public and the area's responders.